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SUBJECT: NINEWA: CHRISTIAN IDPS FLEE MOSUL FOR SAFER
NEIGHBORING COMMUNITIES; NEAR-TERM RETURNS UNLIKELY

Classified By: Ninewa PRT Leader Alex Laskaris, Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) message.

¶1. (C) Summary: Christian IDPs who fled Mosul in the last two weeks are currently out of grave danger and there is currently no humanitarian crisis. It appears that local authorities in the safe-haven communities, with assistance from UNHCR and NGOs, have the capacity to supply food, water, and required non-food items, although stresses to local communities may build over time. Our field work confirmed the figures provided to us by local governments, the UN and the International Medical Corps (IMC) -- at least 1,800 families departed Mosul, primarily between October 9 -13. The GOI is trying to entice IDPs back to Mosul with cash payments, and Coalition Forces (CF) and Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) are trying to enhance protection for the Christians remaining in Mosul and nearby Christian communities. Neither course of action is likely to offer sustainable security absent a broader political settlement in Mosul and Ninewa. IDPs told us they worry that a clumsily implemented American response would risk further identifying of the Christians with the USG and increase the threat to these communities. It was not difficult for the attackers to provoke this IDP flight; reversing it will be an order of magnitude harder.

¶2. (C) Christian political parties have focused on their narrow partisan interests at the expense of the broader issue of the future of minorities in Mosul. We heard reports that many Moslawis responded in the finest tradition of a once-proud cosmopolitan and tolerant city. Long term, the fate of Mosul's Christians will depend on Moslawis themselves, and a rekindling of the multi-ethnic, multi-sectarian spirit of their city. With regard to the USG response, we are responding aggressively but we also need to be cautious to do no inadvertent harm to those we seek to help. End summary.

¶3. (C) PRT Ninewa, joined by Embassy Baghdad political officers, 1AD, and UNAMI representatives, toured IDP concentrations in seven towns in northeast Ninewa on October 16-17: Al Qosh, Tel Uskuf, Batnaya, Tel Kayf, Qarakosh, Keramalis and Bartalla. All are within areas of Ninewa under the effective control of the KRG, and all are within 35 km of Mosul city. We spoke with heads of household and family members representing more than 500 people over two days, using a standardized list of questions. We also met up with GOI, UN and NGO officials on the ground. We kept our participation to the working level, believing that the presence of PRT leadership or senior CF personnel would have skewed the results of this field work.

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What Happened?

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¶4. (C) Although accurate casualty figures remain elusive, between eight and 16 Christians were reportedly killed in

Mosul, beginning between September 28 and October 1. A relatively small number of IDPs were personally threatened; some got SMS messages or saw photocopied leaflets and others had unknown persons asking to see their identity card. Others were warned by Moslem neighbors, and some were told to leave by parish priests. The majority appear to have taken flight out of fear stoked by the initial reports of murders and then the subsequent departure of others. The numbers provided to us by IMC and the local governments appear accurate: at least 1,800 families departed Mosul, with most leaving October 9-13. We cannot say with confidence how many Christian families were in Mosul prior to the flight; one contact -- whom we have found credible in the past) told us that the number was 2,500. IDPs appear to have come from all parts of the city, but mainly from the east bank of the river. We do not know the identity and purpose of the killer(s). Most of the IDPs had theories, but none offered eye-witness accounts or insights that would allow us to determine conclusively those responsible or their motives.

Current status of IDPs

¶5. (C) The IDPs have reached safe havens. While we cannot exclude the possibility of future attacks, IDPs are behind KRG lines in smaller communities which have had significantly better security than Mosul itself. Most of the IDPs found accommodation with friends or relatives in nearby towns and villages; others rented houses in safe areas. Some are living in monasteries, parish halls, or other public buildings. (Tents hastily erected on orders of the Ministry

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of Migration and Displacement (MODM), probably as a publicity exercise, were never used and later removed.) USAID/OFDA-grantee IMC, notified of the problem on October 9, moved quickly starting October 10 to distribute non-food items funded and /or provided by UNHCR and USAID/OFDA. They have produced daily humanitarian situation reports since then. KRG Finance Minister Sarkis Aghagjian made cash payments to the families. MODM also delivered food and supplies and promised cash stipends to the displaced. Medical workers who traveled with the teams reported no serious health problems, although the IDPs living in public buildings will need better sanitary conditions if they shelter in place. Food appeared to be in ample supply. The most common complaints from public sector workers were loss of salaries, and parents' worries about disruption of children's education.

GOI response

¶6. (C) The Government of Iraq has responded with the right messages, but its policy response is circumscribed by the limits of its tools: money, police and army. Despite his responsibilities directing a major ongoing ISF offensive (supported by CF) in Mosul, Nineva Operations Command (NOC) leader LTG Riyad Talal joined senior CF personnel at an October 11 PRT-convened town hall meeting in Bartalla. This was the first time that this group of Christian community leaders had engaged Riyad. For his part, Riyad showed what we believe to be a genuine concern for the Christian community of his native city and pledged additional security assets from both Iraqi Army and Police under his command. Governor Kashmoula offered immediate cash benefits to IDPs; both he and Vice Governor Goran reassured civil servants that their salaries would continue to be paid. The Baghdad and KRG Ministries of Return/Migration were on the scene pledging assistance. However, IDPs we interviewed evinced no confidence in either the government or the police; attitudes towards the army were better, but insufficient to convince IDPs to return. CF were also widely criticized as ineffective on this issue.

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Christian political party response
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¶7. (C) Christian political party leaders were quick to ascribe blame for the IDP flight, while our interviews with IDPs revealed deep resentment toward the Christian political leadership. Political party representatives portrayed the events of the previous two weeks in a manner consistent with their longstanding political views on key issues. Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) officials (who oppose membership in the KRG) were quick to lay the blame on Kurds. The pro-KRG Assyrian Patriotic Party said that AQ/ISI, in collaboration with the Iraqi Police, was responsible for the violence, and the ineffectiveness of the GOI response demonstrated that Christian interests were best served by integration into the KRG. Other Christian political leaders said that the violence was a result of Christian protests over the CoR's rejection of Article 50 of the elections law; still others said that the IDP flow demonstrated that an autonomous Christian political entity was the community's only option. By contrast the IDPs we spoke with raised none of these political issues, except to express anxiety that Christian political activity (even seeking to have the GOI hire more Christian Police) could further provoke those who were attacking them.

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Moslawi Muslims take a stand
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¶8. (C) A common theme we heard from the IDPs was how their Muslim friends and neighbors have supported them over the last two weeks. We heard stories of Muslims warning their Christian neighbors that strangers were asking questions in their neighborhoods. One elderly man whose brother was murdered told us that his Muslim neighbors all came to pay their respects to his family. We heard stories of Muslims who told strangers that there were no Christians in their apartment buildings and who are taking food and supplies to Christians who have remained in their homes. IDPs told us that they are getting phone calls from their Muslim neighbors assuring them that their homes and businesses are being watched over. Some of these attestations may exaggerate inter-communal ties. We also heard from some victims that the terrorists relied on local Muslims to identify their targets. Several said "Arabs" were told not to damage

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Christian properties, since they would inherit them after the Christians fled. One factory owner who fled last year was told by neighbors that he would be prohibited from removing his factory equipment, although he was welcome to return. Nevertheless, the overwhelming message our teams received was that Muslim Moslawis were energized by the plight of their Christian neighbors, even in the face of potential threat to themselves.

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Two analyses that may have merit
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¶9. (C) Ninewa Vice Governor Keshro Goran (a Kurd) told us he believed that the Christians were targeted because they had organized political demonstrations in the wake of the rejection of Article 50. He said that there has been mandated minority representation in Iraq in the past that, generally speaking, it was not objectionable. Goran noted that radical Islamists were opposed to the notion of a Christian political demonstration, and of any non-Islamic political identity in Iraq. When asked who was responsible for the crisis, Ninewa Deputy Governor for Administrative Affairs Yussuf Lalo (strictly protect), a Bartalla Christian said &we don't know and we couldn't say it if we did (that would mean more attacks against us (we are in

darkness, and all people fear the darkness.⁸ As to the motive, Lalo said &to punish us, to punish you (it,s the same to them.⁸ He said that many believe that the Christians support the coalition, and many more believe that the coalition supports the Christians. &Killing us causes you pain⁸ he said. Many IDPs said they had been directly threatened also told us they were unwilling to speculate on the identity of the culprits out of fear.

Comment: Helping, and Avoiding Harm

¶10. (C) With minimal effort, someone or some group provoked the flight of at least 1,800 families from Mosul, perhaps half of its Christian population. In contemporary Ninewa, the most violent province in Iraq, the attacks and threats against Christians have a political influence far in excess of their statistical incidence. To get the IDPs to return will require far more than the status quo ante (and more than just the pledged GOI payments to returnees of one million Iraqi dinars (\$840)) the same it pays to any returnee nationwide). Perceptions of security will determine whether and when people return, and that may await an underlying political settlement. In the meantime, U.S.-funded humanitarian organizations are responding to humanitarian needs. Coalition Forces have significantly augmented presence in Mosul in connection with the ongoing Operation "Mother of Two Springs II." There are now Iraqi Security Forces guarding many Christian facilities and houses in Mosul. To return the Christians to fortified communities, guarded temporarily by ISF and living behind T-walls, however, could single them out for future attacks. We will want to maintain contact with Christian IDPs to avoid taking steps that could be counter-productive or inadvertently lead to the extinction of the Christian community from Mosul.

¶11. (C) In the longer term, especially following the withdrawal of U.S. combat power, the hope of the Christian community will rest in large part on their fellow Moslawis. We believe most Moslawis view their Christian brethren as part of the social fabric of their once-proud city; essential humanity and civic commitment has apparently survived intact the depredations of recent times among many Moslawi. Jewish life in Mosul was extinguished in the wake of Israeli independence. The Shebak largely fled the city in 2004. The Yezidi departed en masse in 2007. We will have to think creatively and respond robustly to prevent history from repeating itself. End Comment.

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